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SUBJECT: POSSIBLE UNDERGROUND TORTURE CELL DISCOVERED

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Local media reported on July 12 that an underground cell had been discovered in the police station of Villa Vieja, outside of Tegucigalpa. The Public Ministry continues to investigate a claim that torture was committed here on at least one occasion; however, little progress has been made in verifying this claim or in identifying possible suspects. End Summary.

2. (U) On July 12, local newspapers reported that an underground cell had been discovered in the small local police station of Villa Vieja, located about 30 minutes outside of Tegucigalpa. Discovery of the cell came as part of an investigation by the public prosecutor for human rights into claims by Jose Orlando Carbajal that he had been tortured at this site in August 2006 before being transferred to a police station in El Progreso.

3. (SBU) According to the public prosecutor investigating the case, Suyapa Vasquez, Carbajal claims to have had his hands tied behind his back and head covered before being pushed into cell measuring approximately 4 meters wide by 4 meters long by 2 meters deep. Once in the cell, Carbajal says he was also beaten as a way to get him to confess to his alleged crime. (Note: Carbajal was being charged with murdering the nephew of the President of national congress, Robert Micheletti He was later found innocent of this crime but remains imprisoned for other legal infractions. End Note.)

4. (SBU) Investigations into Carbajal's case began when the case was first raised by a Honduran human rights NGO; however, initial investigations mistook the alleged cell, which was originally created as a holding cell for prisoners of war when the station was used as an army bunker, to be a water cistern. It was not until speaking to Carbajal again more recently that investigators were able to locate the cell.

5. (SBU) To date, little evidence has been found to confirm whether or not Carbajal was tortured. Carbajal claims to suffer from back pain from an injury sustained when he was thrown into the cell. Besides this, it is not clear that other injuries existed or were documented shortly following the incident. Initial attempts to identify traces of blood produced no results and subsequent attempts to collect physical evidence have been stunted by the constant flow of rainwater into the cell.

6. (SBU) Efforts to identify those potentially responsible for Carbajal's detention and mistreatment have also been limited. Carbajal identified one of two suspected torturers from the preventive police squadron in court; however, this identification was found to be insubstantial by the court because it was based solely on voice and shoe recognition. (Note: Honduran law requires suspected perpetrators to physically conceal themselves in court. End note) Additionally, the investigative police unit, which Carbajal assures was responsible for his mistreatment, continues to deny involvement of the identified officer in the crime, stating that he was stationed elsewhere at the time of the incident.

¶7. (SBU) Lack of documentary evidence has also made identifying those who may have ordered Carbajal's mistreatment difficult. Police logs at Villa Vieja do not mention either Carbajal or the officers he suspects were with him that night. Public prosecutors believe that the incident was intentionally omitted from the official record and was ordered by an intellectual author, whom they believe comes from the higher ranks of the police in another district.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: At this point, there has only been one allegation of torture at this site; however, the publicity that the cell received could prompt others to come forward. PolOff was surprised to learn during her visit to the cell that the public prosecutor for the case was only then checking the log books for the Villa Vieja police station (for a 2006 case), reinforcing again the slow pace at which investigations seem to be moving. In addition to logistical and technical limitations, such as the public prosecutor's limited transportation and investigative resources, possible links between high government and police officials to Carbajal's case give us reason to believe that external factors will continue to interfere with these investigations. End Comment.

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